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ABSTRACT

Several studies recently conducted by the Federal government and private organizations have produced new information about dropouts. Findings from these studies are summarized so that parents can have up-to-date information when talking to their children about dropping out. Urban and minority students are more likely to drop out of school. The gap between dropouts and more educated people is widening as more of these students drop out. Returning to school for a General Educational Development (GED) certificate can reduce this gap. Statistics show that men who return for a GED earn 21% more than dropouts; women GED holders earn 18% more. Dropouts describe their personal and social lives as being very difficult before they dropped out, and often express these difficulties and a dislike for school as reasons for dropping out. Many felt that the adults in their lives did not help them stay in school. Parents, recognizing this fact, can make an effort to keep their children in school by arranging extra academic help when needed, helping them with personal problems, helping them schedule their obligations to be able to stay in school, and helping them understand what the consequences of their actions will be. If all efforts fail, parents can help young people find a GED program and encourage them to stay with it for an alternative diploma. (SLD)

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NEW INFORMATION ON YOUTH WHO DROP OUT: WHY THEY LEAVE AND WHAT HAPPENS TO THEM

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
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It has been known for many years that young people who don't complete high school face many more problems in later life than do people who graduate. But, while national leaders have demanded that schools, communities, and families make a major effort to retain students, the dropout rate remains high.

Students drop out for many reasons, some which may even seem like good ones at the time—to help out their families or to start new ones, for example. Their decisions may even be supported by the people closest to them, in the belief that they have no choice. But the consequences of leaving can be great, and there are many concrete things that schools and families can do to help students stay in school, or get an alternative education, and also meet their personal responsibilities.

Several studies recently conducted by the Federal government and private organizations have produced new information about dropouts. Some update statistics regularly kept on these youth. Another reports what both graduates and dropouts who began high school in 1988 said about their school and personal lives. Finally, a study on the value to dropouts of getting a General Educational Development (GED) alternative high school diploma leads to some surprising, and encouraging, conclusions.

Findings from these studies are presented below so that parents can have up-to-date information when talking to their children about dropping out.

Facts about Dropouts

Who Is at Risk of Dropping Out

The following information shows certain groups of young people whose members are more likely than others to leave school before graduating. While not everyone in these categories drops out, paying special attention to the needs of students from these groups can keep some of them in school.

- Students in large cities are twice as likely to leave school before graduating than non-urban youth.

- More than one in four Hispanic youth drop out, and nearly half leave by the eighth grade.
- Hispanics are twice as likely as African Americans to drop out. White and Asian American students are least likely to drop out.
- More than half the students who drop out leave by the tenth grade, 20% quit by the eighth grade, and 3% drop out by the fourth grade.

Earnings and Opportunities for Dropouts

The gap between dropouts and more educated people is widening as opportunities increase for higher skilled workers and all but disappears for the less skilled.

- In the last 20 years the earnings level of dropouts doubled, while it nearly tripled for college graduates.
- Recent dropouts will earn $200,000 less than high school graduates, and over $800,000 less than college graduates, in their lives.
- Dropouts make up nearly half the heads of households on welfare.
- Dropouts make up nearly half the prison population.

Earnings and Opportunities for GED Holders

In the past it was thought that returning to school to get a GED certificate didn't have much effect on a person's job opportunities. Regardless, each year nearly half a million people get a GED. A recent study shows, however, that there are large differences between those who drop out and those who get a GED, not only in the ability to find a job but also in the wages they earn:

- Men who got a GED earned 21% more than male dropouts; women GED holders earned 18% more than female dropouts.
- While only slightly more than half the dropouts were either working or looking for work (called "in the labor force") over 80% of those who had gotten a GED were in the labor force.
- Twice as many women GED holders were in the labor force as women dropouts. In fact, nearly two out of three female GED holders were in the labor force.
- For African American men, 85% of GED holders were in the labor force, compared with 60% of dropouts.
- For Hispanics, 93% of GED holders were in the labor force, compared with 77% of dropouts.

The Lives of Dropouts

In a recent survey, dropouts, approximately 18-years-old, were asked to tell about their lives before they decided to leave school. They said that both their personal and school lives were very hard. Experiences like these, which the dropouts described, can be a warning sign that a student is a dropout risk:

- 20% were married, living as married, or divorced, with females more likely than males to be married. Nearly 40% percent had a child or were expecting one.
- Nearly 25% changed schools two or more times, with some changing for disciplinary reasons.
- 12% ran away from home.
- Almost 20% were held back a grade, and almost half failed a course.
- Almost one-half missed at least 10 days of school, one-third cut class at least 10 times, and one-quarter were late at least 10 times.
- One-third were put on in-school suspension, suspended, or put on probation, and more than 15% were either expelled or told they couldn't return.
- 11% were arrested.
- 8% spent time in a juvenile home or shelter.

Reasons Why Youth Drop Out

Dropouts listed both school problems and personal factors as reasons for dropping out:

- Didn't like school in general or the school they were attending.
- Were failing, getting poor grades, or couldn't keep up with school work.

- Didn't get along with teachers and/or students.
- Had disciplinary problems, were suspended, or expelled.
- Didn't feel safe in school.
- Got a job, had a family to support, or had trouble managing both school and work.
- Got married, got pregnant, or became a parent.
- Had a drug or alcohol problem.

What Parents Can Do To Prevent Dropping Out

Despite leaving high school, many dropouts said that they expected to continue their education. Most planned to finish high school eventually, and some were interested in a career education school, college, and even graduate school. Since they had these goals, it is even more unfortunate that they couldn't be helped to stay in school. But many youth thought that schools didn't do very much to try to keep them, and that their families didn't try much harder. While it is possible that these youth didn't recognize some offers of help, it is important for youth to realize that the adults in their lives do want them to remain in school and are willing to do a lot to make it possible.

Here are some ways that parents, working with school administrators, counselors, and teachers, can help their children remain in high school:

- Arrange for help with making up missed work, tutoring, placement in a special program, and/or a transfer to another school.
- Help them with personal problems, and/or arrange for professional help.
- Help them schedule work and family obligations so that there is also time to attend school.
- Help them understand that the choices they make—like marrying, becoming parents, failing courses, or behaving badly enough to get suspended—can seriously disrupt their ability to finish school.
- If students do become pregnant or parents, help them find school and social programs that will meet their special needs.
- If all else fails, help them find a GED program and encourage them to stay with it until they get an alternative high school diploma.

This guide, written by Wendy Schwartz, is based on **School Dropouts: New Information about an Old Problem** *and* ***The Impact of Vocational Education on Racial and Ethnic Minorities****, two digests published by the ERIC Clearinghouse on Urban Education. Please send a stamped, self-addressed envelope to the Clearinghouse for a copy of these digests and a list of other Clearinghouse publications.*

Other guides to help parents help their children learn can be found on the National Parent Information Network (NPIN) on the Internet. You will find these guides in the Urban/Minority Families section of the Urban Education Web (UEweb) at http://eric-web.tc.columbia.edu. You can reach other sections of the NPIN Web through UEweb or at http://ericps.ed.uiuc.edu/npin/npinhome.html. The NPIN Gopher is at ericps.ed.uiuc.edu. Ask someone in your local library, your children's school, or your parent center how to see the information on this network.

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